CLAY GEERDES' _ COMIX WAVE

SAMUEL LANGHORNE CLEMENS (1835-1910)

Born in Florida, Missouri, on November 30, 1835, Samuel Langhorne Clemens grew up on Hill Street in Hannibal, Missouri, where his family moved in 1839. He was working as a job printer in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1857, when he decided to quit and go on the river. By September of 1858, he was a licensed river pilot. He named himself Mark Twain after working as a riverboat pilot on the Mississippi River. The phrase Mark Twain means that all is clear ahead, just what a pilot likes to hear from the man taking the soundings. I visited Hannibal in April of 1988 and found the street Clemens grew up on closed to traffic and turned into a cobblestoned tourist attraction. On one side was the small white house with green-trimmed windows Clemens lived in around 1843. Next to it was a stone museum containing some of his things. There was an old writing table and a typewriter. Twain was one of the first American writers to use a typewriter for his manuscripts. There were 16 original Norman Rockwell paintings on the wall, most of them **SATURDAY EVENING POST** covers. The rooms in the house had been set up with furniture from the period of Clemens' youth in the 1840's. Tourists could put on headphones and hear recorded stories from Clemens' books, mostly anecdotes about Tom Sawyer who was based on Clemens and his boyhood friends. Clemens attributed many of the colorful things others did to Tom Sawyer, making the Tom and Huck books a composite of actual incidents from his childhood. Across the street diagonally from the Clemens house was the home of Becky Thatcher, now a bookstore on the lower floor. Upstairs, a few rooms were preserved along with a more than life-sized figure of Becky in a white dress, standing there forever to greet the tourists ogling her in that glass-enclosed bedroom.

On the way to Hannibal from St. Louis, a woman we were travelling with was complaining about our not having a map. Preferring to explore for myself, I've never been much of a map person, and I told her I suspected we would find Mark Twain's name on just about everything in town. I was right, of course. There was the Mark Twain Hotel, Mark Twain Wax Museum, a fried chicken place, even the frozen yogurt place near the bronze statue of Huck and Tom that looked out over the main street was called Mark Twain's World. We climbed the steps up Cardiff Hill to the lighthouse. I reached the top ahead of the women and started laughing, because the first thing I saw was a white park bench. On the back of it, some contemporary Huck Finn had sprayed **FUCK YOU** in black letters. That was our humorous welcome to the lighthouse. The building itself had never been used and had no light inside. It was built as a memorial to Twain for the centenniel and was dedicated about 1937. We looked out over the Mississippi River. No rafts out there now. A native came along and told us about the town, how the shoe factories that supported it were gone now and the population was down to about 18,000. He asked me if I had heard the song **WABASH CANNON BALL** and pointed past the lighthouse to a bridge where the train used to cross. I had forgotten the Wabash Cannon Ball *was* a train. We walked back down the hill and looked for a place to eat lunch. On an off street we found Virginia's Place and went inside. We put a couple of tables together and looked at the menu. A Buffalo fish dinner was only $2.50! The prices were amazing to us, because everything in California is so high. You do not eat out for $2.50. Even junk food is higher. The three of us had enormous meals and the check was less than $10 . The food was great and the women who cooked it were friendly. It was like having dinner with family. The ladies apologized for not having catfish, but no one brought it in that day. Their fish is caught in the river by local people and all along the Mississippi catfish seems to be the favorite. We saw signs advertising it everywhere. In St. Louis, the fast food chains have bought old riverboats, paddle-wheelers, and moored them on the levee where they sell french fries and micro-burgers to the tourists. You can ride on the river for an hour on the *Tom Sawyer* if the mood hits you or ride up in the Arch that celebrates St. Louis as the Gateway to the West. We decided to do that and it was really a strange experience. There is an elaborate elevator system inside the arch, a string of eight modules, each of which holds five people. This means 40 people make the four minute ride to the top at a time while 40 others are descending. If you're at all claustrophobic, this would terrify you. Think of a bathysphere and you've got it. All you can see out the tiny windows in the door are cables and concrete walls. At the top the doors open and you go up some steps into the viewing area. The windows there are small and people lean over to look out at St. Louis on one side and the Mississippi River on the other. After you've looked around and taken your pictures you line up for the three minute ride back to the lobby museum.

I suspect all that tourist hoopla would make Sam Clemens a little sick to his tummy. Though he told part of his life story in **LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI**, he only allowed his **AUTOBIOGRAPHY** to be published after his death. He wrote it mostly in 1906 and he died in 1910. It's one of the saddest books I ever read, filled with heartache. It's also a book filled with anecdotes about the people he met along the way. Clemens' river days ended in 1861 when the Civil war started. He took off for the west with his brother, Orion and wound up in Carson City, Nevada. By 1862, he was writing for a living as a reporter for the **TERRITORIAL ENTERPRISE** in Virginia City, Nevada. In 1864, he moved to San Francisco to work for the **CALL**. Always on the move in those days, he was gold mining in 1865 when the war ended and by 1866 was in the Sandwich Islands in Hawaii sending dispatches back to the Sacramento **UNION**. In 1867, he headed for New York by way of Nicaragua, started lecturing regularly, and published his version of the **CELEBRATED JUMPING FROG OF CALAVERAS CREEK**. He refers to 1867 as the last year he really worked for a living. He always enjoyed writing and didn't consider it work. Like Frank Baum, he loved being on stage and didn't consider it labor either. For a short time, he was secretary to Senator Stewart of Nevada in Washington, DC. In 1869, he worked for the **BUFFALO EXPRESS**. He married Olivia Langdon in 1870 and moved to Hartford, Connecticut in 1871 before going to Europe for a visit. His life changed radically when he married Livy. Her father was a wealthy man and from the time of their

marriage Clemens began to live in luxury with his own mansions and servants. In 1876, his fame was secured with **THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER**, and he began the write the **HUCKLEBERRY FINN** sequel. As with **TOM SAWYER**, he hit a dry spell with **HUCK** and put the book aside. It wasn't completed until 1884. At first Clemens was bothered when he ran dry in the middle of a book. It happened with **TOM SAWYER**. Half the book was finished and he ran dry for two years before taking up the manuscript and finishing it. After awhile, however, he realized this was natural for him, that he would lose interest at a certain point and just have to wait until his unconscious worked out the problem before he could go back and finish off the book. In 1895, Clemens lectured all over the world and by 1900 he was in England arguing copyright law before the House of Lords. His view was that a writer and his heirs should own the rights to a work forever, that a literary work was property and should be protected the same as any other property. Clemens visited Hannibal for the last time in 1902, the year he was given an honorary doctorate from the University of Missouri. Livy died in 1904. He gave her credit for editing many of his manuscripts. In 1907, he was given an honorary doctorate from Oxford in England where he had been a celebrity since the publication of **THE INNOCENTS ABROAD** (1868). When he died on April 21, 1910, Mark Twain was one of the most famous Americans ever known. Clemens had created the character of Mark Twain on stages all over the world and he was more proud of his ability to deal with his live audiences than he ever was with his books. In his autobiography, he trivializes the humor in his books and would, I am sure, rather be remembered as a sage or social philosopher. Fact is, though, reading Twain's **AUTOBIOGRAPHY**, one realizes that he was the consummate hypocrite, spending most of his time with the super-rich, the oil barons and bankers, men like Henry Huttleston Rogers who saved him after his bankruptcy and helped him to become wealthier than ever. Sam Clemens was always the sucker during his life, the guy who fell for get-rich-quick schemes like those of the Duke and the Dauphin in **HUCK FINN**. His judgment of character was terrible when it came to hiring people to work with him in his various publishing and business ventures. It was his know-nothing nephew who bankrupted the firm he started to publish his own books, and had it not been for Rogers, Clemens would have ended up without any of his copyrights and stone broke.

Clemens was the master of the aphorism, the anecdote, the short story, but he could not sustain the longer narrative and what distinguishes his work today is the childrens' books he wrote, not his attempts at historical romance. **THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER** pales in comparison with **A TALE OF TWO CITIES** and **A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT** doesn't really measure up to, say, H. G. Wells' **THE TIME MACHINE**, though it *is* more fun to read than Edward Bellamy's **LOOKING BACKWARD**. As Mark Twain, Clemens was famous and had a commanding and lasting presence on stage. He would have revelled in television as much as Walt Disney did and I think it is appropriate that the riverboat in Disneyland is named for him. Samuel L. Clemens, on the other hand, was a troubled and unhappy man much of his life, one who had seen too much tragedy. He blamed himself for the death of his firstborn son when the boy died of exposure to the cold after a ride with his father. Clemens became preoccupied with his own thoughts and did not notice that the blanket had fallen off the two year old child. Sam's favorite brother, Henry, died in a steamboat explosion in 1848 at the age of 20. All his early life as a writer, he was ripped off by various publishers. His experience of the world is well reflected in **LETTERS TO THE EARTH, THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER, THE MAN WHO CORRUPTED HADLEYBURG**, and other works, most of which were published after his death. Mark Twain was the public funnyman everyone loved, but Sam Clemens, the private man, was an unhappy cynic who held his fellow man in low esteem and many of his fellow writers in even lower esteem. If Sam Clemens is one of your idols, best leave his **AUTOBIOGRAPHY** unread.

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COMIX PLUGOLA

SCREAMING DEATH is 35¢ pp from Ed Huyck, 16389 Gladiola Ave., Rosemont, MN 55068.* SHAMAN 50 is 75¢ pp from William Dockery, 3226-A River Ave., Columbus, GA 31904.* FAN'TOONS 22 is $1.75 pp from Edd Vick, 5014-D Roosevelt Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105.* Scott Stevens has two new ones: MR. FIX AND HIS SNOWCONE PROGNOSTICATOR and MR. FIX AND THE KIDDIE SHOW. Both for 1.80 pp. 2725 Franklin, #1211, Mesquite, TX 75150. UNDERGROUND SURREALIST MAGAZINE 3 is $2.85 pp from Mick Cusimano, POB 2565, Cambridge, MA 02238.* Four issues of the Haight-Ashbury poetry and comics tabloid for $10 from 1943 Page St., #2, San Francisco, CA 94117. Art by Spain, Steve Lafler, and others.* THUNDERBUNNY ends with #12, but I suspect the character will return one day.* CEREBUS continues with #109. THE PUMA BLUES is in it's 16th issue. from Aardvark-Vanaheim.* Dan Day's beautifully drawn series of SHERLOCK HOLMES continues with #12 from Renegade Press. Brad Foster's MECHTHINGS 4 is out.* EL VIBORA 98 is $7 from J. M. Berenguer, Plaza Beatas 3.08003, Barcelona, Spain.* The San Francisco EXAMINER's IMAGE MAGAZINE ran an article entitled ZAP TURNS 20 by Warren Hinkle III on April 17, 1988. Photos of Crumb, Spain, Moscoso, et al., but the article is mostly about Dori Seda.* Rather Ripped Records has moved to Oakland. Russell Ketter opened across the street from the Grand Theater at 3237 Grand. 415-839-1703. I'm told the prices are too high, but this is a source for those who collect sixties records.* Bill Ward, who created Torchy, has some t-shirts for sale. SASE for details from him at Box 413, Roselle, NJ 07203.* GREAT VICTORIAN NOVELS REVISITED: Charlotte M. Yonge's THE DAISY CHAIN (1856). You might also want to take a look at CHRISTIE'S OLD ORGAN (1875) by Mrs. O. F. Walton. Why don't they ever reprint stuff like this?

CLAY GEERDES

UNDERGROUND COMIX CATALOG
Once again I have revised my catalog of underground comix. $1 gets you a listing of 700 titles, including reading copies and rarities, 'homegrowns' and major titles. CRUMB, BODĒ, CORBEN, and SPIEGELMAN are all here.
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